

**North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Quarterly Meeting**

February 6th, 2026, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Central Pines Regional Center

4307 Emperor Blvd, Suite 110

Durham, NC 27703

Members Present:

Senator Gale Adcock
Keila Armas-Velasquez
Christina Armfield
Stephanie Bland
Antwan Campbell
Michael Evola, Council Chair
Frank Griffin
Stephen Latus
Mike Lupo
Senator Chris Measmer
Robert C Nutt, MD, MPH
Randall Pope
Laura Robison
Laurie Rook
David Rosenthal
Representative Brian Turner
Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair
Donald Tinsley, Sr
Dr. Jessica West
Jennifer Woodard, AuD

Ex Officio:

Tony Davis (Present)

Members Absent:

Linda Amato
Rey Castillo Jr.
Kathryn Dowd, AuD
Betty Kelly
Greta Knigga-Daugherty, Pd. D
Representative Paul Scott

Call to Order, Welcome, and Ethics Reminder

Michael Evola, Council Chair

The meeting was called to order at 9:13 a.m. by Chair Michael Evola after a brief delay waiting on final communication access to be set.

Chair Evola welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Council members introduced themselves, stating their representation on Council, and how many years they been on the council.

A new mission and vision statement that was adopted by council last November then read to the group:

“Our mission is to improve the health, education and wellbeing of North Carolinians who are deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind by partnering with and advising the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Public Instruction to ensure effective, high quality and accessible programs and services. Our vision is to be the leader in public services innovation, interagency cooperation and Adirondack vote Casey for the communities we serve. Let this mission and vision guide us in the work that this council does. So, in accordance with state law, it is the duty of every council member to avoid conflicts of interest.”

None of the members acknowledged having a conflict of interest or appearance on matters listed on this agenda when asked, and Chair Evola then invited Vice Chair Hope Turpin to talk about the communication access rules and guidelines for the meeting.

Communication Access Guidelines Reminder

Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

Vice Chair, Turpin Turner reviewed the communication access rules and guidelines for the meeting.

Approval of the Previous Meeting Minutes

Michael Evola, Council Chair

Motion #1: Laura Robison (Antwan Campbell) made a motion to amend the minutes from the last quarterly report as she noticed a correction that needed to be made to the minutes

- On page 6 of the report, it says that North Carolina educators educate more than 1.5 students, which is one and a half students. It should read 1.5 million students. The word Million is missing.
- **Motion carried**

Motion #2: Steve Latus (Robert Nutt) made a motion to approve the minutes from the last quarterly meeting

- **Motion carried**

Council Chair Report

Michael Evola, Council Chair

- We aim to develop two additional committees for the council:
 - Community engagement committee:
 - They will develop strategies to build relationships, identify community means and opportunities to engage the community, foster collaboration and cultivate legitimacy with the public and state partners.
 - The Legislative Affairs Committee:
 - They will monitor and analyze existing or proposed legislation for policies that could impact on our community, educate decision makers on potential impacts, propose amendments to our governing statutes and make draft recommendations to decision makers.
- Communication access and Education will remain as permanent standing committees.
- Possibly 4 committees will be developed by May, but those discussions are ongoing. Vice Chair Turpin Turner and I will be coordinating committee assignments for these new committees.
- A form will be sent out to check council members' preferences on a first-come first-served basis. Council member lived experience, professional expertise and council representation will also determine committee assignments. Those committee assignments will be sent out, hopefully, before our next council meeting.
- All four committees will have a work session, possibly, at our next council meeting.
- Committee chairs will need to be selected for those two new committees, and each committee will need to decide on a consistent date and time that they would like to meet virtually each month
- Confirmation received from Boards and commissions that they're going to be finalizing any outstanding reappointments and vacant appointments for several council positions that we currently have vacant, vacancies for, and we do have a meeting scheduled with them later this month.

- We are exploring the opportunity to have our quarterly council meetings across the state beginning in 2027. We're planning to possibly meet in Morganton, the Charlotte area, Durham, in Wilson.
 - This would be more equitable for council members traveling to council meetings
 - We aim to offer the public the opportunity to come to our council meetings so they can have direct access to us, ask any questions or comments or voice any concerns to the council.
- We have a new initiative for public comments in the meeting agenda.
 - Members of the public, although welcome to our meetings, have never had an opportunity to address the council directly so now we're going to provide that opportunity for member of the public to direct those comments, questions or concerns to the council.
 - Members of the public can address the council, and it will be limited to 2-3 minutes, and they must sign up at the check-in table during the lunch period. There will be a sign-up sheet for members of the public with their name and the county they reside in.
 - We want to make this council more accessible to the communities we serve so with those future meetings throughout the state in 2027, we want members of the public coming to address the council directly.

Council Vice Chair Report

Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

Vice Chair Turpin Turner chose this opportunity to as a teaching moment. She presented a slide show of trivia questions with visual descriptions of each slide.

- Which state quarter has Helen Keller featured?
 - New York
 - **Alabama- there is a picture of one side of the Alabama coin. It's Helen Keller in her rocking chair which is depicted on the quarter**
 - Connecticut
- Who in Hollywood, what select has a cochlear implant?
 - A. Milly Bobbie Brown from Stranger Things
 - B. Rob Lowe
 - **C. Lou Ferrigno-He has a cochlear implant from the company Cochlear**
- Which European princess was deaf and helped hide Jews during World War II?
 - **A. Princess Alice of Battenberg- She is the great great grandmother of Prince William in England**

- B. Princess Alexandra of Denmark
- C. Princess Elizabeth of Austria

The Legislative Process

Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

- You, as an American citizen, have the right and privilege to vote.
- You have a right to express how you feel about things in your life and some countries don't have that right. Politics is a big part of our life, and this presentation is non-partisan. It doesn't apply to any party.
- We are appointed by the Governor except for three positions. The Pro Tem of this Senate is here with us and that's appointed by the Speaker of the House.
- The sign for politics is a P on the Temple of the head.
- Add is the sign for an amendment. We can make an amendment by removing text or changing text or adding to text.
- The sign for bill is to fingerspell B-I-L-L. A bill is a proposal for a new law. And law controls many parts of our lives.
- My favorite sign is voting. Non dominant hand is in shape of letter O (represents a box), and your dominant hand is in shape of letter F (placing ballot in box). The reason the sign looks like this is there was no electronic voting when we first started. It was a paper ballot that you put in the box and that's what that sign is representing.
- The sign for Veto is taking a thumbs up to a thumbs down. A bill can be vetoed in two different ways. The Governor must sign a bill to become a law, and it has to go through both the House and the Senate, and the Governor can veto that.
- The Chamber sign represents the House and the Senate being represented (two groups or chambers) with two hands. The General Assembly is in the center of politics. Our address here is West Jones Street, downtown Raleigh. If you would like a tour, let me know, as the offices are open to the public.
- We have the Senate and the House. The House has 120 members and the Senate has 50, and we vote annually. Every two years is when we vote for those positions. The chamber has an upper balcony so the public can watch.
 - You can ask for ASL interpreters. They will be provided if you'd like to sit in the gallery.
- There are two types of schedules when proposing these bills. We have a long session and a short session.
- There is a handout in folder depicting Journey of a Bill

- The General Assembly is where most of the lawmaking happens. They have different committees that are assigned to members. If a bill is related to health, for example, it's assigned to the Health Committee.
- If a bill does not come out of committee, it dies there.
- There are seven committees to point out:
 - Standing Committees
 - Appropriate Committees
 - Rules Committees
 - Select/Study Committees
 - Joint Committees
 - Conference Committees
 - Oversight Committees
 - A QR code was included in the handout to help find your Representative. You can also go to NCLEG.GOV, click on legislator's tab, type in your address and a map will appear.
- The difference between a constituent and a voter:
 - A constituent is a person that lives in a specific district.
 - A voter is 18 years or older and has registered to be a voter
- If you are looking for a bill, pull up the website NCLEG.GOV. At the top, right corner, it says bill, and there's a search bar where you can type in, for example we typed in HB677, and hit the search button. This will be the latest edition. If you click on edition, the bill will come up on the screen. If you're looking for a specific bill with a specific vocabulary, you can click on the dropdown on the word "bill" and then type in the text that you're searching for.
 - You can set alerts through Google to get notifications of changes and updates with different bills. You can type in specific terminology, like deaf or hard of hearing or VRI, for video remote interpreting, and Google will send you alerts.

Annual Review of Council Bylaws and Member Handbook

Michael Evola, Council Chair

Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

Planning an annual review of our by-laws and our member handbook. Vice Chair Turpin Turner and I felt this was important because we do have several new council members since the last time we had reviewed these documents. In the interest of time today, we are going to do a review of our council by-laws.

- A lot of the information in the by-laws and in the handbook are very much the same.

- In reviewing these documents, Hope and I found that some of this information is a little outdated and we'll be coming back to the council in the future with proposed amendments for you, but there are some highlighted portions in these documents we felt were important.
- In the interest of time, we will only go through the by-laws today.
 - If you have any other questions or concerns, take note, and send that to us after this meeting, we can propose any amendments or changes to our by-laws and handbook.
- The name of this council is the North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The purpose of the North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, herein, referred to as the council, is to make changes and additions to state services for North Carolina citizens who are deaf and hard of hearing and to make recommendations for cost effective coordination of services.
- We have a new mission and vision statement that is based on our governing statutes.
- Our statutes in the law and duty as a council is to make recommendations to the Secretary of Health and Human Services on cost effective provision, coordination and improvement of services to create public awareness of the specific needs and abilities of people who are deaf, hard of hearing or DeafBlind and to consider the need for new state programs concerning deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind people, to advise the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services about implementation of services being given to citizens who are hard of hearing, deaf, DeafBlind.
- Advise the Secretary of Department of Health and Human Services and the superintendent of the department of public instruction regarding planning, implementation and cost-effective coordination of state programs providing education for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or DeafBlind. And to respond to the request to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services for advice and recommendations pertaining to any matter affecting deaf, hard of hearing or DeafBlind citizens of North Carolina.
- Adhere to all state laws, rules, policies and Executive Order that may pertain to the avoidance of conflict of interest. A conflict of interest exists when a member participates in a way that directly affects his or her personal or financial interests. The council may at times make recommendations that could substantially affect the personal or financial interests of council members, members who have a possible personal or financial interest and action to seek determination from the council as to whether a conflict of interest may exist. If so, that member should

abstain from participating in discussion and voting and should be reported as abstaining when those votes are taken.

- Pursuant to our state statutes, the council consists of 28 members, 20 members shall be appointed by the Governor, and we do have a few members who are appointed either by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services or the superintendent of public instruction.
- All members shall be appointed to a term of four years. No member shall serve more than two consecutive terms unless he or she is an employee of DHHS or DPI, representing the respective agency as a specialist in the field of service.
- Our council members' responsibilities are to attend and participate in meeting of the council, be knowledgeable of council positions and activities regarding issues of concern for people who are deaf and hard of hearing and effectively represent the council to the public.
- Members are to actively participate in assigned committees through regular attendance and discussions.
- Council meetings shall convene at least two or up to four times a year to conduct business. We regularly meet four times a year. To establish goals, to conduct business and to approve the recommendations of committees and workgroups.
- The council executive committee consists of a minimum of the council chair, vice chair, and includes chairs and representatives of the standing committees, as well as the ex-officio member representing the Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We serve as governing body between the council meetings making day-to-day decisions of the council, making recommendations for new policies or actions and we're empowered to take action on behalf of the council when any action is required between council members and deliberation by full council is not feasible, and such power and action have not been delegated to the Director.
- With our committees, the council shall develop committees to identify issues, make recommendations for policy or action and it is appropriate to participate in the implementation of decisions and activities affecting persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or DeafBlind. Two or three standing committees are recommended to focus on issues of education, interpreting, insurance, communication access, community affairs and others may arise.
- Annually in July, the council may review the committee's needs, change names or functions of the committees as appropriate.
- The Director of DSDHH shall appoint and recommend state government staff to participate in ex-officio capacity in the community and provide staff support.
- As needed, council can also establish task forces for the purpose of investigating or acting on specific or urgent needs. These task forces are limited to acting on the

issues for which they are created and within the timeframe established for the assignment.

- For these committees, the Chair will appoint, with the approval of council, members to these committees. And each committee member will serve on that committee for the life of the committee or task force. The Chair may remove or replace a task force chair, committee chair or a committee member. You can also change committees or ask for that change as well.
- Any suggested amendments to these by-laws must be presented in writing in a regular or special council meeting. Action on suggested amendments shall not occur until the next regular or special meeting and ratification shall require a two-thirds majority vote of the voting members.
- Regarding these by-laws, when we were reviewing these we felt that there were some things here that needed to be updated. We are going to come back to the council at our next meeting and present some recommendations to discuss and hopefully in our meeting either in August or November to ratify those changes, all with suggested changes.
- Questions or concerns regarding the by-law by Council members:
 - Antwan Campbell: Section 6, Procedures, the Roberts Rules of Order. The council typically hasn't followed that, but I see it there. Do we need to eliminate that, or do we need to start following it?
 - Chair Evola- We are supposed to be following it. I believe we are following them for the most part.
 - Vice Chair Turner- we will have to review those and ensure that we are adhering to the Roberts Rules of Law and that we are adhering to those.
- We will skip the member manual for now and we'll come back at a later time to review that in the interest of time.

Communication Access Initiatives with the Department of State Treasurer

Dara Baril, NCDHHS Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program Lead

Accessibility is advocacy. Oftentimes we think about advocacy as a separate entity. It means access.

- The Department of Treasury is who we met with. We wanted to emphasize accessibility, and we wanted to collaborate with what was involved. We need access to the webinars that are posted about retirement to help people figure out a plan for the future.

- We wanted to bring awareness of ADA information and explain that compliance to them. And we wanted to make sure that they had insight on what was needed.
- We wanted to collaborate on an action plan. How can we improve this access for people who are deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind? How can they have access to retirement webinars and information for their planning needs? It's their benefit as a state employee that they need to access. And we need equal access to information.
- To ensure that information is accessible to us, webinars and conferences held, appointments with retirement counselors to sit down and have those planning meetings, communication for that as well.
- My goal was to have an open dialogue to make sure the deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind individuals that are state employees have access and there's thousands of us.
- Four key issues that we identified:
 - A lack of accessibility for retirement webinars. A lack of procedures and how to ask for those accommodations, who to contact for those who arrange that, how do they know what my needs are, how I can express my needs in terms of accommodations.
 - Define a process to explain how those accommodations would work.
 - Have strategies or going compliance, following the ADA, following the law.
 - Awareness and doing outreach. That's important because several state employees have been complaining about this lack of access and they hadn't got results in the past.
- Strategies in which to communicate with our communities. We discussed requirements for interpreters if that's accommodation. We wanted to emphasize to them that interpreters must be licensed here in NC, having assignment information about the webinar prior to, any appointments for consultations or conferences, meetings. It's important to share information with that interpreter prior to going into that to make sure that the interpreter is well prepared. And recommending that there are two interpreters for each assignment, especially if it's several hours for a meeting or webinars that move in a very quick pace, they would need two interpreters.
- When I got the invitation to the Department of Treasury, I thought I need to collaborate with DSDHH as the experts so we can advocate on how we can compromise on how we can develop new procedures and strategies to improve the services that they offer.
- I felt like the spirit of collaboration should be in the forefront. I wanted to make sure it's a positive environment, that they were willing to listen, that it was impactful.

- Future plans are to ensure that these webinars are set up for sign language interpreter access, if it's recorded live to make sure those interpreters are visible, those recorded sessions would mean that if someone wasn't able to attend that webinar that recording is accessible to them and they can access that. Also to have CART overlay on those videos, have captioning available.
- I discussed the past sessions that they held, what to do with those and how they could become accessible. I thought we would record those sessions with access to include those accessibility features that I mentioned.
- I want to acknowledge the support that I received from DSDHH, in particular, the Office of Language and Communication Access, OLCA, and the Accessibility Resource Programs Team at the Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- DSDHH is going to provide training and develop a Deaf Different, Different World for the State Treasurer Department. They're going to provide continuing consultation, provide logistics information of how to coordinate all the logistics connected to that. Working with sister agencies as well, all working together as one whole to collaborate to solve these issues.

Council Group Photo

Education Committee Work Session - Long Leaf Room

Jennifer Woodard, Aud, Committee Chair

Committee Members: Senator Gale Adcock, Stephanie Bland, Christina Armfield, Antwan Campbell, Frank Griffin, Mike Lupo, Robert Nutt MD., Laurie Rook, Representative Brain Turner, Vice Chair Hope Turpin Turner, Keila Armas Velasquez, Tony Davis

Accessibility Committee Work Session - Central Pines Room

Laura Robison, Committee Chair

Committee Members: Dara Baril, Chair Michael Evola, Senator Chris Measmer, Randy Pope, David Rosenthal, Donald Tinsley, Caylee Weaver, Jessica West, PhD.

Community Conversations

Tony Davis, NCDHHS Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Director

Community conversations started one year ago when I became DSDHH Director, as a desire to hold town halls, so I started talking to the staff and community.

- The problem with town halls is that a few brave people get up and share a few things and it's not effective to gather input and data from people that you need to build a strategic plan.
- I met with my team. We felt like the best way to do this was to host focus groups of eight to ten people roughly to gather data. This means I will sit with eight to ten people at a time around the table and have them lead the conversation and as they lead the conversation, I will listen and I will restate and I will let them drive it and I will ask some questions, and they can ask each other questions.
- We get a lot of data about barriers and about gaps in services and what people would like to see DSDHH do
- I may find out some information about what DPI can do, and I will share that with them. I can find out what the council can do, and I can share that with the council. As I'm meeting the groups of people, it's going to give us a great amount of data.
- Leslie Jones, DSDHH Program Plan Evaluator at DSDHH is going to capture everything being said. We're going to create themes, and those themes are going to drive our strategic plan.
- The community conversations will be set up around the state, but I need you to inform the community about these conversations. If you tell me where to go, I will be there.
- ASL interpreters will be at each meeting location along with CART/captioning. Also, tactile sign language interpreters at any meeting that's requested.
- It does not have to be deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind consumers, it can be professionals such as teachers of the deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind. It can be parents with Spanish-speaking families or parents who have children in the school system who are deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind.
- Starting to set- up these community conversations between now and June.
- I'm hosting two community conversations tomorrow in Morganton.
- I want to meet with interpreters. I want to meet with professionals. If the legislature wants to meet with me and tell me what they want, I'll meet with them.
- What is important is that we listen to everyone and then we build a strategic plan from that.
- Our webpage lists community conversations. You can click on community conversations. It's a purple ribbon and you can learn all about it, and there is there's a video about it.
- I anticipate we're going to have 30 community conversations, but I want more. The more people we meet with, the more data we'll have. The more data we have, the more we can say this is what we are doing for the State of North Carolina.

- We need a moderator in Spanish. We need to make sure that the communication that happens is effective, and we hear everything that's needed by the community. We will do what we have to do to set it up in a way that works for the community, translation and Spanish for the fliers and how we talk with the group, we will make sure that it's done in the language that allows them full access to share their experiences and their feelings about gaps, barriers, lack of services.
- Contact A.J. Sondossi and she will set these conversation dates up with the different Regional Centers.

North Carolina Association for the Deaf Report

David Rosenthal, Council Member

- The North Carolina Association of the Deaf is one of the oldest associations in the state. The National Association of the Deaf is the oldest organization serving people with disabilities. Specifically, deafness. They've been around for over 120 years. NCAD was established in 1908.
- The website is www.OURNCAD.org. Visit the website to get updates on this association.
- Mike Lupo, who is representing the deaf community on this council is the current president of the North Carolina Association of the Deaf.
- If you go on the website, you can click on the Board members to see the members. They represent all regions of North Carolina statewide. Their organization meets quarterly in different areas across the state.
- NCAD has three priorities that they focus on:
 - Advocacy - We do that on a large and small scale. It could be for individuals or for groups. It could be writing letters for individual deaf community members or writing those letters to businesses for groups.
 - Education – We partnership with the DSDHH to focus on education as any state association for the deaf does want to improve advocacy and education of the people in the community that are deaf.
 - C collaboration- We partner and work with other agencies and organizations to improve the quality of life of the citizens of North Carolina who are deaf, DeafBlind, deaf plus and hard of hearing.
- Recent updates for NCAD:

- We're collaborating with the North Carolina American Sign Language Teacher's Association, NCA SLTA to set up webinars, to preserve language acquisition and language use of American Sign Language.
- We collaborated with Language First, NCA SLTA, the same organization, and hosted a conference in Wilmington, North Carolina. That conference was dedicated to supporting families and educational teams by promoting awareness of ASL and English bilingualism, and also the critical role of strong evidence-based first language foundations for deaf and hard of hearing children.
- We are collaborating with both NCA SLTA and UNC Greensboro to present an upcoming statewide conference that will happen later this month on February 20th and 21st at UNC Greensboro. It will target teachers of the deaf, interpreters, ASL instructors and speech language pathologists, as well as audiologists, parents and students.

Hearing Loss Association of America North Carolina State Association Report

Stephen Latus, Council Member

I'll provide you with a bit of background about HLAA, its mission, and impact. I will highlight what we do in North Carolina and conclude by highlighting current, high priority issues for HLAA.

- What is HLAA?
 - For 45 years, the hearing loss association of America has been the nation's leading unconflicted consumer organization representing millions of people with and at risk of hearing loss across the U.S.
 - HLAA was originally called self-help for hard of hearing people. It was founded by Rocky Stone, a retired CIA agent and U.S. veteran, who lost his hearing at age 19 from an explosion in World War II.
- HLAA's official mission statement:
 - HLAA is building a hearing health movement empowering millions with and at risk of hearing loss to thrive through education, advocacy and a nationwide network of support. There are 50 million Americans with hearing loss. We like to think that every day our work is improving their lives.
- Examples of HLAA's impact:

- Over the past 20 years, HLAA's Walk for Hearing, hearing health awareness and fund-raising program has raised \$20 million for hearing loss support programs. Annually, there are 20 Walk for Hearing events across the country, including the North Carolina Walk for Hearing which is held in Cary in October.
- More than 20,000 people have turned to HLAA's over-the-counter hearing aid resources for help.
- The HLAA website is **Hearingloss.org**.
- HLAA advocated for the approval of OTC hearing aids which became available in 2022.
- More than 5 million people saw important hearing health messages from HLAA in the year 2024. In addition to the recently updated Hearingloss.org website, people get messages from HLAA through major media.
- 120 HLAA chapters offer local support and advocacy in communities across the U.S.
- In North Carolina, there is an HLAA state association and two local chapters. I'm the president of the Wake chapter which serves the Triangle. There is a Charlotte chapter.
- The Wake chapter shares hearing loss information at local health fairs. We provide scholarships to Wake County high school students with hearing loss, and we assist venues in obtaining assistive hearing technology. We recently gave neck loops to the Martin Marietta Center for the Performing Arts in Raleigh to enhance the flexibility of its existing assistive listening technology.
- What is the focus of HLAA today?
 - HLAA is advocating for captioning in theaters, meetings, devices and digital content. Promoting hearing assistive technology in public venues and workplaces.
 - We are pushing for fully accessible cell phones and over-the-counter hearing aids.
 - HLAA has asked its chapters to support the communications video and technology accessibility act. CVTA will soon be introduced in Congress. This legislation will update accessibility requirements that were last updated in 2010. Current accessibility requirements don't account for innovations, such as on-line streaming, video conferencing, or tools using artificial intelligence.
 - Beyond accessibility issues, HLAA is supporting employers, employees and job seekers with resources. Educating health care providers and patients on inclusive communication. Empowering people with hearing loss to speak up for their rights.

- Additional sources for HLAA information:
 - Hearingloss.org
 - The Wake Chapter website is NChearingloss.org/wake.
 - Wake Chapter has a Facebook page and certainly you can reach out to me at SLATUS56@Gmail.com.

North Carolina DeafBlind Associates Report

Randall Pope, Council Member

Randy Pope is the current president of the North Carolina DeafBlind Association. The organization was established about 40 years ago. The goal of the organization is to help the DeafBlind community. We want to ensure that they're successful in their lives.

- One of our goals now is to get our community together, as many DeafBlind individuals are isolated throughout our state. They're in pockets throughout the State of North Carolina, in rural areas.
- You may have one or two DeafBlind individuals in a particular area at a time. Some have none. We know North Carolina is vast.
- With them being so far apart, we'd like to get them together for networking purposes, to socialize, to support one another, whatever their needs are in that moment, they can share that in our gatherings.
- DeafBlind conference is hosted yearly. We work on networking there. There are also fellowship and learning opportunities for the DeafBlind community. We also introduce new technology.
- There is a DeafBlind retreat entitled Camp Dogwood, where we can enjoy our socialization, fun activities with complete access for all.
- We have a holiday festival at the end of the year, which is an exciting event each year. Our DeafBlind individuals get together and enjoy fellowship together for the holidays.

In the DeafBlind community, there are many barriers that we face.

- The number one obstacle is transportation for our DeafBlind community. We must be able to get to conferences, camp, our holiday parties, or just to get together to enjoy each other's company.
- Sometimes we get interpreter requests also for these events and it's hard to find transportation or volunteers to get us to these events. DSDHH is there for us and DSB is also very helpful, but our needs are vast. We need more support.

- We are hoping that you as a council can support us. Volunteer your time to support us, as a support service provider, an SSP. SSPs allow us access to the visual environment around us. It can give us environmental information, and act as a human guide. DSDHH has provided SSP and does provide SSP training that you can take.

Chair Evola asked if there are any initiatives going on right now to remove the transportation barrier to make it easier to get to the different activities, the camps, the social outings, the camps, and social outings.

Randy Pope response:

- Our transportation system doesn't take us everywhere we need to go. The public transportation system here in North Carolina isn't adequate. The access to transportation is also a barrier, such as sometimes the bus drivers will forget about the DeafBlind members and continue their route and not drop us off or let us know that we reached our destination.
- The train system is nice here in North Carolina. But access to communication is lacking.

Dr. Nutt mentioned a past conversation where Randy mentioned that NC did not have enough SSPs, support service providers, to provide adequate support. He asked if Randy could give a sense of availability of SSP support services that are needed.

Randy Pope response:

- I have found some individuals that are willing to volunteer for me. I have two individuals, in particular, that are dependable for me. There's a lot of people out there that are willing to help myself and my wife.
- A lot of the times when people say they wouldn't mind volunteering, oftentimes, when asked, they will say they can't help at that time.
 - Imagine that sometimes I have to wait long periods of time before I can get a volunteer to meet my minimum needs.
 - I would love to even enjoy a leisurely walk around the neighborhood and that's hard to do, too, without support from our support service providers.
 - Oftentimes, I'd like to go to a store, and I think I will take a cab. I'll ask the cab driver to take me where I need to be. They may be able to guide me to the door but then they just leave, and I have no way to return, and of course, I can't see when I go in the store. I don't know what's there, what I'll be on, where I'm going. I might be there for two or three hours just to get my basic necessities.

Keila Armas asked a question. She is in communication with several Spanish-speaking families who have children who are blind or deaf, and they do not get involved in community activities related to the DeafBlind community because they do not have access to the communication. Is there any way that these families could get involved in activities that were mentioned?

Randy Pope response:

- One area which would help you is DPI, the Department of Public Instruction, as they may be able to help the parents with their children. I honestly don't know much about DPI, but I would encourage you to reach out and make that request through DPI.
- Related to the gatherings, in terms of children, there is one DeafBlind gentleman who lives in the Charlotte area. He is Hispanic. 100% Hispanic. He communicates using a text translation app, and that's how he communicates back and forth with the community. There has been little contact over the last year, which is worrisome, as ICE came through Charlotte very recently.

North Carolina Black Deaf Advocates Report

Donald Tinsley, Council Member

NCBDA is focused on empowering the black deaf community across North Carolina through advocacy, education and unity.

- We are interested in building bridges, empowerment, providing support and connection.
- We partner with the National level of Black Deaf Advocates; NBDA is their acronym. They were established 40 years ago, in 1982. Prior to that, the black deaf community was asking for support and leadership. They were feeling a bit of oppression. They got together after a lot of work, establishing NBDA in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1982.
- We have annual conferences on the national level for NBDA. We have an inclusive membership that is very diverse and includes black deaf, hard of hearing individuals, parents, interpreters and professionals, as well as allies that collaborate, black DeafBlind members are there as well.
- The organization focuses on several specific areas such as services providing self-advocacy workshops. We support leadership, education, and development as well as access.
- Our programs are transformative programs that change lives. We have the Andrew Foster scholarship and NBDA collegiate scholarships listed. We have our youth

empowerment summits; the acronym is YES. We have our collegiate black deaf student leadership institute and our black deaf senior citizen program.

- The Andrew Foster Scholarship:
 - Andrew Foster was a graduate from the Alabama School for the Deaf. He tried to go to Gallaudet but at that time, they did not accept black deaf students. Once they accepted that student population, the year was 1950, Andrew did go to Gallaudet, and he was the first black deaf graduate of Gallaudet University. I believe he went to Michigan to pursue his graduate degree. He then went to Africa to establish deaf schools, and I believe he established 33 deaf schools in Africa. He encouraged many students to come to Gallaudet university for further education, so we are honored to have that Andrew Foster scholarship.
- NCBDA hosted a biannual southern regional conference in 2024. That was during Hurricane Helene that we hosted that conference. It was a successful conference. Here are some conference highlights:
 - Friday evening, there was an opening ceremony at the Town Center Mall and Saturday morning, Pamela Lloyd-Ogoke provided a workshop to participants. Saturday afternoon, My ASL Teacher Rocks hosted a “Celebrating Black Deaf Excellence in the Past, Present and Future”. So that was a wonderful event. We want to thank Relay North Carolina specifically for providing the sponsorship for the lunch that day.
 - There was a message from our NBDA President Cheryl Emory.
 - There was a senior citizen sponsored breakfast
 - General elections were held to vote on a new slate of Board members
 - Martina Moore-Reid led us in our financial budgetary needs
- Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, we plan on having our biannual national conference. That happens on odd years. The last one was in Kansas City and the next one in 2027 will be in Richmond, Virginia.
- Our regional conference also happens biannually, but they take place on the even years. The Alabama Black Deaf Associates will be hosting the regional conference. We have five regions across the U.S., south, southwest, east, central and north.
- The NBDA Senior Citizen Summit taking place in Chicago, October 1-4, 2026.

Education Committee Report

Facilitator: Jennifer Woodard, Committee Chair

Reporting: Christina Armfield

Focused on:

- Money
- Personnel
- Data

Issues and Recommendations:

- Money has an impact on the work that we need to do throughout the state when it comes to education of our students.
- Looking at our resources throughout the state and what teachers we have and their knowledge base and how we are really moving outcomes forward for students within our districts
- Where is the data coming from that we need to analyze as a committee to make recommendations from here and in the future? What evaluation results and assessments are we looking for that can be presented to us so that we can have better conversations moving forward?
- We have an ask for some information to be shared with the whole council next session in May. That request is for additional information to be presented to us as a council.

Action Items:

- We have decided to meet every month that we don't meet as a council altogether virtually, so that we can move some of this work further and faster as a group
- We are asking that we have someone come to discuss and give us an update on the interpreter licensure bill, which is House Bill 854, at the next council meeting

Accessibility Committee Report

Facilitator/Reporting: Laura Robison, Committee Chair

Focused on:

- Communication access survey
- Loss of sign language interpreters
- Funding for communication access in small municipality meetings
- Communication access across state agencies

Issues and recommendations:

- A communication access survey for the council and possibly the public, and we discussed that we would like to incorporate some of the information from the community conversations.
- We discussed the difficulties of the lack or loss of sign language interpreters and we discussed recruitment of interpreters and that there are only two programs in North Carolina, two four-year interpreting training programs. We had David Payne come to speak to us about some of the things he's been doing.
- Small municipality meetings may not have the funding to provide interpreter services and CART, and we want to look into the feasibility of possibility of finding a pool of funds that could help pay for that. David Rosenthal mentioned a pilot program in Minneapolis, and so that was one thing that we did discuss.
- Office of Communication and Language Access is working on trying to resolve the issues of communication access across state agencies so we thought it might be a good idea to have them come and explain what their plans are and how they're trying to work together for communication access within the state and how we can use some of that information for other agencies as well.
- **Action Items:**
- We want to incorporate the information that is being gathered for the community conversations so we're going to wait until those have happened and we'll use that information to craft a survey about communication access issues
- We would like to have David Payne come back to speak to the full council to explain all of the many different ways he is trying to improve interpreter recruitment in our state

New Business

Motions

- **Motion#1:** Christina Armfield (David Rosenthal) made a motion that the council ask DPI to create a strategic stakeholder group of experts that we have input in as a council to create training videos and a resource kit for schools for students that use all modalities of communication and to also add and send out throughout the state any professional learning opportunities that are available not just from DPI but from other state agencies that educators can attend.
 - **Motion carried**
- **Motion #2:** Christina Armefield (Mike Lupo) proposed that we ask DPI to come in and present an overview of the '24-'25 school year and House Bill 317 data that they

have collected as it aligns to the intention of House Bill 317 Law and then to also report how they are using their resources for data analysis and improvement of outcomes for students who are deaf and hard of hearing throughout the state.

- Frank Griffin asked to amend the motion. He suggested that instead of 317 that we spell out the session law 2013-119.
- Christina Arfield accepted the amendment.
- **Motion Carried**
- **Motion #3:** David Rosenthal (Antwan Campbell) moved that more time be allocated for committee meetings on the agenda.
 - Representative Turpin Turner asked how much additional time was being requested, and given the constraints of the schedule, what might be arranged for that time.
 - David Rosenthal asked that the agenda be more flexible or adjusted, as the issues that the council is trying to address and resolve are in depth and time-consuming and it is best for committees to have more time to discuss and focus on critical issues and that discussion.
 - Vice Chair Turpin Turner added that the current schedule will only occur once annually where we have reports from different constituencies represented.
 - Dr Nutt agreed with David Rosenthal but also added that there will now be monthly meetings within our committees so there will be more meeting time between council sessions.
 - Chair Evola agreed with Dr Nutt. Dr. Nutt, as it is the intention to have virtual meetings for the committees during the months in which council is not meeting in person as a council.
 - **Motion carried.**

Dr Robb Nutt would like to see guidelines on how to share out what committees worked in between quarterly meetings with the general council. This might be a motion that could be worked on and presented later.

- Committees have met in between sessions and may develop motions and then need to wait to present that motion at the quarterly meeting. Some kinds of guidelines are needed for that to make sure that the motions move forward.
- Chair Evola agreed that some policies regarding that could be developed. Concrete policies to ensure that information is being sent to council members.

- **Motion #4:** Chair Evola (Frank Griffin) would like to entertain a motion for amending our general statutes to increase the council member from 28 to 30 to include representatives from the school for the Deaf and the Eastern School for the Deaf. It is felt that having representatives from these schools and providing them with a seat at council would be very important as we want to grow our community, increase our network and collaborate. A motion today is made to make a recommendation to determine the feasibility of that, how can we put that into motion, is there is a motion for that initiative.
 - **Motion Carried.**
- **Motion #5:** Laurie Rook recommended making a motion to take legislative action by writing a letter to ask for two more seats on the council represented by the two North Carolina schools for the deaf. Laurie Rook said having retired from the schools for the deaf, she thought it would be great to have representation from both schools, but every time we asked we were told we can't because we're represented by DPI. Now that schools are not under DPI, it's a great opportunity to try for that.
 - Tony Davis said he doesn't know if anybody wants to take a different legislative matter. Not only does the DHHS Secretary have the opportunity to ask the liaison to work on that, but the DPI Superintendent could do that. We could write letters to both, and that would probably get both of them working together or both DHHS.
 - David Rosenthal said Tony Davis brought up DPI but if the schools are no longer under DPI, why would you want to include DPI in that request?
 - Tony Davis responded to David Rosenthal that the council advises DHHS and DPI. It is inclusive.
 - Dr Nutt mentioned that the general statute that stands up the council and talks about makeup of the council, whether the schools are under DPI or not, the fact that they have been taken out from under DPI, it makes sense that they have representation here on the council.
 - David Rosenthal asked who does represent them on the council, would it be a Board of Trustee member from one, or both of the schools, that is what we're envisioning?
 - Chair Evola said It could be a Board of Trustees member for each of the schools, or it could be someone that each of the schools recommends being appointed.
 - Senator Adcock said it depends on how the bill is written. We could write to add two members and liaison within DHHS to identify the sponsor, and you can decide what would be the most specific or be open-ended. It's who you

would recommend and that's how they could write the bill. That would be a long session bill, that would be the 27th that would be appropriate to do.

- Laurie Rook said she doesn't think we want to just limit it to the Boards. Because it may not be a bad idea to have somebody who's actually in education every day, such as a teacher. If it's not a Board member, maybe the Board could recommend.
- Vice Chair Turpin Turner recommended that we amend to say that it would be a person selected by the council. It doesn't have to be a Board of Trustee representative. It could be a representative from the schools for the deaf selected by the council.
- Chair Evola said he thought initially, he was thinking it would be up to the schools to make a recommendation for someone to be appointed to represent them. He mentioned that by the statewide Independent Living Council, we make recommendations to the Governor's office for appointment to that council.
- **Motion #6:** Representative Turner (Dr Nutt) motioned that we table this motion for this meeting and give Senator Adcock and himself some time to look at what legislation might look like, keeping it compatible with the existing statute for the council and other Boards and commissions so that you can come back with a recommendation at our next meeting.
 - **Motion #5 Tabled**

Council Web Page

- All of the contact information for council members including home address, phone numbers and personal emails is listed on the web page.
- Some members have now been the targets of phishing attempts so we would like to develop a solution to this issue where we are looking at two possible ways to move forward.
- The first way is essentially developing a council email address. It could be an **info@deafandhardofhearing council.gov** where people could email comments and concerns via that address.
- The second way is to develop a council email and then have emails forwarded to individual council members or that could also be having each council member has their own council specific email.
- The other option is having a forum on the web page where people can put in their contact information, which council member they want to reach out to specifically and then have that go to the council member that they want to send that message to.

- The goal is to protect council member’s privacy, and I believe the guidance reports and conditions was that as a council, we can make whichever decision we want to regarding that. But there is no requirement to have personal emails or home addresses on the web page.
- **Motion #7:** Antwan Campbell (David Rosenthal) moved that we set up a council email address, one email address for entire council. He does not think we need individual council email addresses.
 - **Motion carried.**

Public Comments:

- There were not any comments from the public at this time.

Closing Remarks

Vice Chair Turpin Turner reported back to the Education Committee today, as they had asked for an update on HB-854 on the requirement for educational licenses:

- It did pass the House with one vote in opposition, 110 for, 1 against. It passed easily. It's now been in committee for quite some time, in the Rules and Operations Committee. It has not died. April 21st of this year our short session begins, so we need to get strategic about how to get that bill on the floor. It might get referred to another committee. To help it get referred to another committee. It is in the Senate chamber, not the House, as it has passed the House. It's in the Senate to be specific.
- Antwan Cambell asked if there is a specific time limit for how long a bill can be stuck in a committee before it dies.
 - Senator Adcock responded that the bill is technically alive until December 31st of this year. It depends on when the session ends. If we adjourn prior to that, every bill that has not had action dies. It has all of the Short Session for possible movement.

Chair Evola said that regarding that initiative, he had sent a second letter to Senator Rabon inquiring from his office a few days ago and initially sent a letter to also in December. There has not been a response.

Chair Evola shared with the council that he has also sent a letter to Superintendent Green a few days earlier that a copy is in each council member’s packet.

- In November 2025, at our last council meeting, there was a presentation regarding DPI's strategic plan and there were a few inquiries from council members that were

asked, such as what efforts, if any, include American Sign Language and a dual immersion program, if they would consider a task force on the issues of deaf and hard of hearing students, how would the strategic plan specifically address the needs of the underserved populations of the deaf and hard of hearing community, and then if they would be willing to provide the opportunity for representation for the schools for the deaf on their innovation leadership council and how can our council be utilized in the implementation of the strategic plan.

- An email was sent to superintendent Greene and he responded and said he was glad to hear from us and he's really supportive of our advocacy and these initiatives. He's going to get back to Council as soon as possible.

Chair Evola asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting.

- Antwan Campbell (Dr. Rob Nutt) made a motion to adjourn the meeting.
 - **Motion carried.**

Adjournment: 2:54 p.m.

2026 Meetings: May 1, August 7, and November 6

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